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# Berwick Wildlife Group

[www.berwickwildlifegroup.uk](http://www.berwickwildlifegroup.uk)



Facebook; Berwick Wildlife Group

## Monthly Review. December 2020

### Chairman's notes

Out final Newsletter of 2020, a year like no other in living memory for many of us.

Seeing Malcolm's note at the end of the year of a **Nuthatch** in Berwick, I am pleased to say that they are regular visitors to our feeders in Chirnside ever since we started feeding this autumn.

You will be aware that we are looking for ways to keep the group functioning and with that in mind, here are two links to some online talks, hosted by one of the local Scottish Wildlife Trust groups. They are the first time they have organised this type of event so forgive a certain lack of 'slickness' if it happens!

Argaty red kites;

<https://youtu.be/ssTMXN0sYCK>

Sea eagle re-introduction on the east coast of Scotland

<https://youtu.be/6GuWP6oiatM>

These are both on YouTube (you don't need to sign up!). You can scroll through the intro stuff if you want to! There are also other videos available on the SWT YouTube channel.

We are also looking at sharing talks organised by other groups were possible.

### **WILDLIFE REPORTS.**

**Weather;** December seems to have been a month running both 'hot and cold'.

The first day of the month, we woke up to a frost and sunny spells and a fresh northwest wind. All change came on the 4<sup>th</sup> with rain all day and a blustery northeast wind. It rained every day for the next five days with prolonged heavy showers. By the 9<sup>th</sup> we had accumulated 60mm of rainfall

The wind turned to the South on the 12<sup>th</sup> with yet another spell of prolonged showers. The wind fell light on the 16<sup>th</sup> bringing mild conditions with sunshine and light showers. Again the wind swung back to the northeast gradually moving to a cold northerly by Christmas Day.

The 'Met' Office warned of the approaching storm 'Bella', which blew up to gale force on Boxing Day but moved on without any local disruption, unlike the south of England where flooding, wind damage and even a light snowfall were recorded. The main effect of 'Bella' in Berwick came as it passed on the 27<sup>th</sup> with the barometric pressure falling to a deep low of 960 millibars as its centre passed over us. The north wind over the last four days of the year saw cold, sunny spells with showers and clearing skies at night and a return to frost. The exception came on the 29<sup>th</sup> with a spell of heavy rain overnight, which fell as snow at higher levels. New Year's Eve saw a light dusting of snow early, but wintry showers turning to rain brought the year to a wet and rather dismal end. Surely it can only get better in 2021 – can't it!!

Rainfall has been high over the month with 114mm (4.45 inches). Indeed it turns out to be the wettest month of the year.

Looking back over 2020 as a whole our weather conditions have been getting more unpredictable and unseasonal. The first three months were mild with only a few frosts and no lying snow. April came and went without any measurable rainfall at all, the first time this has ever happened here since 1976.

The summer months were warm, without being hot, more days with thin high cloud and light showers than those with blue skies and high temperatures.

The autumn period of named storms appeared early in August, with storm 'Ellen' bringing gale force winds in mid-August, the remnants of ex-hurricane 'Laura' coming to us in early September, via the Gulf of Mexico, the eastern seaboard of the USA and across Ireland. In October the storms kept coming, with storm 'Alex' in early in the month, bringing the wettest day in the UK since records began. Needless to say, Berwick escaped the worst of it with 23mm falling over two days.

Over the year no laying snowfall has been recorded, except for a light dusting on two occasions in March and the last day of the year. Frost occurred about on the average through the winter periods but with no severe conditions.

Rainfall figures over the year came to 663 mm. or 26.1 inches, making it the driest year recorded by us over the last decade.

**Birds;** During the first week of December several people asked me where I thought all the birds had gone. It was a mild start and a number of common species did not seem to be around. Unusually, a **Blackbird** was even singing a quiet sub-song in my garden on the 7<sup>th</sup> was the only bird around. We need not have worried, as with everything in this unusual year, the birds were more notable as the month moved on. **Fieldfares** were about in flocks around our area with 86 (6<sup>th</sup>) rising to 120 (20<sup>th</sup>) at West Ord. Other flocks included c.80 at Billylaw (20<sup>th</sup>), c.95 Longlands School (24<sup>th</sup>) and c.60 at Gainslaw (26<sup>th</sup>). Numbers of **Teal** on Middle Ord pond were the highest I've recorded over two decades, with (38) 6<sup>th</sup>, (136) 10<sup>th</sup>, (c.270) 13<sup>th</sup>, dropping back to 140 (20<sup>th</sup>). Throughout, numbers like **Curlew** and **Goldeneye** have been low in number, but maybe the colder weather during the last week will bring numbers back in the New Year.

Regular sightings saw 246 **Lapwing**, 126 **Curlew**, 8 Blackbirds and 14 **Goldfinch** at Cocklawburn (3<sup>rd</sup>), with 4 **Reed Buntings** and 5 **Stonechats** near the pond there. **Wigeon** numbers were good at New Water Heugh with 48 (6<sup>th</sup>) rising to 87 by the 27<sup>th</sup>. A fine drake **Long tailed Duck** turned up at Saltpan rocks Cocklawburn (9<sup>th</sup>) with 28 **Common Scoter**.

Sightings of **Little Gulls** occurred during the WeBS count of the Estuary with a single bird (13<sup>th</sup>) and 2 (14<sup>th</sup>) between Spittal and Cocklawburn.

At Yarrow Slake (14<sup>th</sup>) were 5 **Little Grebes**, 54 **Wigeon**, 112 **Mallard**, 14 **Goldeneye** and 94 **Redshank** on the rising tide. The following day, at Little Beach were 4 **Grey Plover**, 23 **Sanderling**, 8 **Purple Sandpiper**, 66 **Turnstone** with a pair of **Stonechat** at the Coastwatch station. Later in the day, a **Black throated Diver** was in Meadow Haven with 2 **Long tailed Ducks**, 5 **Common Scoter** and 46 **Knot** noted flying south.

A high winter count of 118 **Oystercatcher** were in the coastal fields at Cocklawburn (17<sup>th</sup>) where 18 **Sanderling** and 4 **Ringed Plover** were on the beach. Along the shore at Cheswick Black rocks were a flock of 32 **Twite**. A large flock of 360+ '**Corvids**' were seen flying high to the south at dawn over Tweedmouth (20<sup>th</sup>). The Crow family are known to migrate to the south in the winter months and this was probably such a move.. A flock of 74 **Golden Plover** were on Billylaw and 4 **Common Snipe** were seen at Middle Ord pond.

A fine male **Merlin** was noted near the A1 at Cheswick (22<sup>nd</sup>) with 3 **Mistle Thrushes** noted in Ord Country park. At Saltpan Rocks, Cocklawburn were 5 **Red throated Divers**, 4 **Guillemots** and a pair of **Long tailed Ducks** flying south.

The large flooded field at New water Heugh (26<sup>th</sup>) attracted 7 **White fronted Geese** of the Russian race. There has been an influx of these birds from the continent during the months and were a welcome sight for local birders – they were still there at the end of the month. Other birds with them included 36 **Curlew** and c.90 **Redshank**. On the shore on 28<sup>th</sup> were 87 **Wigeon**, with 3 **Tufted Ducks** and a pair of **Little Grebe**. On Spittal Bay (30<sup>th</sup>) were 4 **Red throated Divers**, 2 **Guillemots** and 5 **Red breasted Mergansers** were on the Calot Shad, including four fine drakes. They were the final sightings of 2020, at least so I thought until I received a pleasant e-mail from a recorder who had the first sightings of a **Nuthatch** on her feeder in Castle Terrace. Not a common bird here, so it's pleasant to find in your own garden. It can be very pleasing the surprises our natural world can bring to us in these trying days.

I would like to finish with a thank you to all of the recorders who have sent in their observations throughout this difficult year. Perhaps the restrictions have got you out in our area a bit more and come to realise that we are very lucky with the diverse range of natural history that presents itself with around the district of Berwick. Let's see what else of interest we can discover in 2021. MHu.

**Mammals;** Still the odd **Grey Squirrel** is being recorded in the Berwick area. As recorded last month, all sighting should go to Red Squirrel Alert. **Otter** sighting have appeared again with records coming from Swing Bridge, Horncliffe, West Ord by the Royal Border Viaduct and a fine male on the last days of the month showing well, feeding in the centre of the Tweed near Tweedmouth Dock.

**Brown Hares** are also being seen in the usual haunts with the unusual record of 24 seen on the 12<sup>th</sup> in the Murton Craggs area.

**Insects;** No notable records this month.

**Other records;**

Thank you to all who have sent in records this month. Can members wishing to add there records to the newsletter, send them to [sightings@berwickwildlifegroup.uk](mailto:sightings@berwickwildlifegroup.uk) or directly to me by the 30<sup>th</sup> of each month at [m.hutcheson08@btinternet.com](mailto:m.hutcheson08@btinternet.com) **We need all your records please.**



Jack Frost's gift for 2020! (Simon Wright)